

VZCZCXRO4338
OO RUEHGH
DE RUEHUL #1651/01 2930754
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 200754Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5956
RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC 9291
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC//DDI/OEA//
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//FPA//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DB-Z//
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0410
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6796
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6864
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 1390
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5176
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 4133
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 7345
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1631
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2943
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2022
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2629

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 SEOUL 001651

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [KS](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; October 20, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo
U.S. Pentagon: "ROK has Obligation
to Provide Aid to Afghanistan"

JoongAng Ilbo
Foreign Executives Finding Place in Korea;
Wide-Ranging Experience Offering Companies Here Competitive Edge

Dong-a Ilbo
One in Four Top-Ranked Students on College Entrance Exams Attends
Special-Purpose
High Schools or Autonomous Private High Schools

Hankook Ilbo
Six Neighborhoods in Southern Seoul Selected as Sites for Second
Batch of Low-Cost Public Apartments

Hankyoreh Shinmun
Analysis of ROK-EU FTA Documents Discloses "Loose" Quarantine Rules
on European Beef Imports

Segye Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun
Additional 39,000 Low-Cost Public Apartments
to be Built by 2013

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

U.S. Pentagon Spokesman Geoff Morrell, in an Oct. 18 interview on a plane en route to Hawaii, the first stop of Defense Secretary Robert Gates' Asia trip, said that all countries, including the ROK, Japan and the U.S., that hope for the peace, prosperity and economic growth of the world, have an obligation to provide aid to Afghanistan. (Chosun, JoongAng, Segye)

On Oct. 18, the White House clarified an earlier remark by a senior defense official that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il had invited President Lee Myung-bak to visit Pyongyang, stating that there was a misunderstanding in Washington regarding the possibility of an inter-Korean summit. (JoongAng, Dong-a, Hankook, Hankyoreh, Segye,

Seoul, all TVs)

Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, in an Oct. 19 speech in Seoul, said that Seoul is ready to meet North Korea at any time to discuss the nuclear issue. (Hankook)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

-Afghanistan

Conservative Chosun Ilbo and Segye Ilbo and right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo gave front-and inside-page play to Oct. 18 press remarks by Pentagon Spokesman Geoff Morrell, in which he said that all countries, including the ROK, Japan and the U.S., have an obligation to provide aid to Afghanistan. He was further quoted: "Afghanistan needs large-scale economic aid now. Any country that finds it difficult to give military support is asked to give financial aid."

The newspapers also quoted another senior Pentagon official as saying: "Although Korea has provided medical support, it would be better for the country to make contributions to other sectors as well. The quicker Korea decides and the bigger its support, the better."

Conservative Chosun Ilbo, in particular, noted the Pentagon

SEOUL 00001651 002 OF 005

spokesman's use of the word, "obligation," and interpreted it as an indirect U.S. request for prompt aid from Seoul. Chosun went on to observe that even though Washington is hoping for economic aid from the ROK in consideration of the country's political situation, it cannot be ruled out that the U.S. may make a "difficult request" for military troops at some point in the future, given that the U.S. is sinking deeper into the mire of the Afghan war. A key ROKG official was quoted as saying: "Even if we send troops to Afghanistan, it would be to guard ROK civilians working in the war-torn country and not for combat purposes."

-N. Korea

Moderate Hankook Ilbo quoted Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan as saying in an Oct. 19 speech in Seoul: "We are ready to meet North Korea at any time to discuss the nuclear issue." He was further quoted as reaffirming Seoul's two-track approach of upholding international sanctions against North Korea while being open to dialogue with the North.

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

SEOUL IS NOT READY TO TAKE OVER FULL TROOP CONTROL
(Chosun Ilbo, October 20, 2009, page 39)

In a briefing about the annual Security Consultative Meeting to take place on Thursday in Seoul, a high-ranking U.S. Defense Department official reiterated that a final decision about the transfer of full control of Korean troops to Seoul in 2012 would be made based on the circumstances at that time, but, at present, the plan was progressing "on schedule." A spokesman for the Korean Defense Ministry on Monday confirmed this. That means at 10 a.m. on April 17, 2012, the responsibility to command Korean troops in case of war will be handed over from the Combined Forces Command to the Korean military and the CFC will be dismantled.

Korea and the United States agreed to the transfer in 2007. They are now at about the halfway point. But just how smoothly are the preparations going? The Roh Moo-hyun Administration announced the transfer of wartime control as if it was a second Independence Movement for Korea. But the situation on the Korean Peninsula is too complicated to be simplified through the lens of populism.

The ROK is under direct threat from North Korea, which is armed to

the teeth with missiles and weapons of mass destruction. North Korea conducted a second nuclear test this year and held 25 test launches of missiles, including ones that can be transformed into intercontinental ballistic missiles. 2012, when the ROK will gain full military command, is also the year North Korea has vowed to complete its preparations to become a "military power."

Over the past 60 years, the reason why the CFC was kept alive was to allow the U.S. military to use its cutting-edge technology to sense any unusual developments in North Korea and to lead both American and ROK troops in defending this country together in the event of an emergency. It takes a lot of money to buy equipment and train soldiers for the ROK military to take on the crucial responsibility of detecting ominous signs from North Korea, assess its nuclear and missile facilities and predict the movements of long-range artillery and 100,000-strong Special Forces.

Seoul said in 2007 it would spend W151 trillion (US\$1=W1,171) to upgrade military surveillance capabilities and modernize equipment. But the latest National Assembly audit reveals that the military lowered the minimum required time for fighter pilot training to 131 hours a year to save fuel, bringing flight hours very close to North Korea's annual average. And some mechanized divisions were found to have filled almost half of their arsenal with trucks instead of tanks. The Defense Ministry asked for a 7.9 percent increase in next year's budget allocation but was granted only a 3.8 percent increase. The only solution is to boost the defense budget while cutting back on welfare spending or boosting taxes. But the ROK is

SEOUL 00001651 003 OF 005

not in a situation to make such changes.

The U.S. had planned to realign its troop presence in the ROK and bolster its naval and air force capabilities, so when the Roh Administration cited the need for the ROK to regain wartime military control of its troops, Washington was more than willing to oblige. This is the political backdrop against which the transfer was decided. In other words, lower priority may have been placed on the ROK's security. Seoul and Washington must begin honest, comprehensive negotiations about security and base the timing of the transfer on the results of those talks.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

FEATURES

MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT PYONGYANG'S PROPOSAL FOR INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT;
WHY DID WHITE HOUSE GIVE EXPLANATION ON SUNDAY?
(JoongAng Ilbo, October 20, 2009, Page 2)

By Washington Correspondent Kim Jung-wook and Reporter Namgoong Wook

News Analysis

A high-ranking White House official contacted the ROK's Washington correspondent corps on the afternoon of October 18, local time. It was highly unusual, especially considering it was Sunday. During the phone conversation, the official said, "there was a misunderstanding" regarding a remark by a senior defense official that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il had invited ROK President Lee Myung-bak to visit Pyongyang. He seemed to be strongly determined to calm controversy over Kim's proposal.

"What Washington wanted to say was that the North has made some peacemaking gestures," the U.S. official said. "In that context, the Pentagon official disclosed the fact that a North Korean delegation talked about President Lee's possible visit to Pyongyang when the delegation met with President Lee during their trip to the ROK in August to mourn the death of former President Kim Dae-jung. However, there was no specific invitation to President Lee." Furthermore, he said, "The clarification was final and the Department of Defense will not have a separate briefing to explain the situation" and made

it clear that the explanation had consensus within the USG. A Blue House official said, "It can be interpreted that their explanation is in the same line with what we said." This consequently has wrapped up the five-day confusion between the ROK and the U.S. over North Korean leader Kim's proposal.

This controversy originated from a closed-door briefing, which was held between U.S. senior defense officials and some of their accompanying reporters on October 15 (Korean time), prior to Defense Secretary Robert Gates' visits to the ROK and Japan. At the end of the briefing, one defense official said, "Suddenly we reached a charm phase with North Korea, with Kim Jong-il inviting President Lee Myung-bak from the ROK to visit Pyongyang." The U.S. Department of Defense requested an embargo on its media coverage until the late afternoon of October 18, when (Secretary Gates) started his tour. After being notified of the statement by the ROK Embassy in Washington, the Blue House, mindful of the sensitivity of the remark, gave a background explanation to accredited Blue House reporters on October 16. A high-ranking Blue House official said, "The Pentagon official made the statement during a briefing. However, North Korea simply expressed its willingness, in principle, to improve inter-Korean ties, and it is difficult to say that a formal invitation has been extended from the North. In the USG's communication process, there appears to be a misunderstanding about what Seoul said to the U.S. in order to share information."

The USG, however, did not provide an explanation until the embargo was lifted. In addition, the Pentagon's briefing set for October 17

SEOUL 00001651 004 OF 005

was canceled. When the ROK media began to give wide coverage to the senior Pentagon official's remark on October 18, the White House, not the Pentagon, came forward to settle the situation.

The key to this controversy is whether the Pentagon official's remark is a far-fetched interpretation based on a misunderstanding or a major mistake of revealing a s-e-c-r-e-t, which was supposed to be kept under wraps. At the moment, the latter is more likely, considering the fact that the ROKG's stance is consistent and that even the White House came forward to provide an explanation. However, when it comes to sensitive matters related to North Korea, both the ROKG and the USG have a tendency not to reveal facts easily. Because the specifics of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's messages - which were delivered to Seoul by the North Korean condolence delegation in August and delivered to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his visit to Pyongyang earlier this month - are not expected to be disclosed, controversy over (whether) an inter-Korean summit (was proposed) may likely continue.

Some observers point out that the ROK and the U.S. should take this incident as an opportunity to reexamine their intelligence sharing system. A diplomatic source in Washington said, "At this critical moment in negotiations with the North, it is not desirable that there appear to be discords between the ROK and the U.S. Closer coordination in the process of sharing and disclosing intelligence is needed."

U.S. RAISES NEED FOR ECONOMIC AID FROM ROK BUT MAY ASK FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE

(Chosun Ilbo, October 20, 2009, page 3)

By Reporter Yu Yong-won and Correspondent Lee Ha-won

With the U.S.-led Afghanistan war deteriorating, the U.S. is making concrete moves by requesting assistance from the ROK.

It seems that the Obama Administration is hoping for economic aid from the ROK (rather than military support) in consideration of the country's (internal) political situation. Economic aid is less likely to spark opposition than military support and it would be difficult for the ROKG to decide on military assistance quickly.

U.S. Pentagon Spokesman Geoff Morrell, in an Oct. 18 interview on a plane, did not specify what assistance the U.S. wants from the ROK. However, Morrell said that a rich country such as the ROK has means

to help develop Afghanistan. He also added, "Any country that finds it difficult to give military support is asked to give financial aid." Previously, when asked about Japan's need to provide support to Afghanistan, a high-ranking Pentagon official said that it is not necessary that Japanese aid be only military aid. Observers say that the U.S. is also taking the same position with the ROK.

Analysts say that there are two reasons why the U.S. has stressed the need for economic aid from the ROK. First, the U.S. understands that it would not be easy for the ROK to make a quick decision on sending troops. The U.S. is also concerned that this issue may trigger anti-American sentiment.

Second, some U.S. observers believe that the scale of troop deployment -- hundreds of forces -- that is being discussed by the ROKG is not of any immediate substantial benefit. Therefore, it seems that the Obama Administration has judged that unless military support is provided right away, it would be better for the ROK to make swift economic contributions.

However, many people in the ROK argue that it is still too early to say that the ROK's aid will be limited only to non-military aid. It cannot be ruled out that the U.S. may make a "difficult request" for military troops at some point in the future, given that the U.S. is sinking deeper into the mire of the Afghan war.

In fact, the U.S. has been unofficially sounding out the ROK on the issue of troop deployment since the inauguration of the Lee

SEOUL 00001651 005 OF 005

Myung-bak Administration. The ROK's foreign and security ministries have considered reviewing their military contributions since the spring. The Defense Ministry has been reviewing an option to send about 500 guard forces since this April. Guard forces will be selected primarily from special warfare command forces which have been deployed in countries such as East Timor, Iraq and Lebanon and which received high evaluation marks from the international community for their civil affairs operations.

The ROKG's basic position is that, under any circumstances, it will not send combat troops. A high-ranking ROKG official said that ROK's aid mainly involves assistance in peace-building activities led by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). The official went on to say, "Even if we do send troops to Afghanistan, it would be to guard ROK civilians working in the war-torn country and not for combat purposes."

This ROK position reflects the negative view towards troop deployment at home and the increasingly worsening situation in Afghanistan. An ROKG source said that the ROKG will not officially use the expression, "troop deployment."

The scale of the ROK's troop deployment, if realized, will depend on the scale of the PRT. The ROKG plans to increase the number of PRT personnel from 30 to 85 by early next year.

The ROKG views, however, that this PRT scale falls short of U.S. expectations and is actively considering greatly expanding the number of personnel. This would also lead to an increase in the number of guard forces to protect the PRT. A military source said that, in any case, there is a high possibility that the number of forces to be deployed will be between 300 and 500.

However, a growing number of ROK people are likely to oppose a military contribution because the Afghanistan situation has been getting worse due to Taliban's increasing presence; and controversy is intensifying over (plans for) additional troop deployment, even in the U.S.

Therefore, some observers say that the ROKG will make a final decision on troop deployment after Afghanistan's runoff election and the ROK-U.S. summit which will take place during President Obama's visit to the ROK.

STEPHENS